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CD Land fill File?

Containers at landfill cause alarm

Navy says matter is not hazardous

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NORFOLK — Forty-four containers reinforced with steel armor and concrete shields have been buried in an atmosphere of secrecy at a landfill at the Norfolk Naval Station, but the Navy maintains the material inside them is not hazardous.

The material included "coffin-like" containers and 37 55-gallon drums, said employees of the Navy Public Works Center. The employees, suspicious of the circumstances, had speculated that the materials might be radioactive.

The containers were brought to the landfill on Feb. 20 on a Navy flatbed truck that came from a Navy facility in Maryland, according to employees who asked not to be identified. The barrels were buried four- to six-feet deep, the employees said.

The employees also maintained that a similar burial took place 18 months ago at the dumping site. Those barrels were buried about 14-feet deep, they said.

The landfill is located south of the Norfolk Naval Station main gate, about 100 yards east of Hampton Boulevard. The landfill is surrounded by an 8-foot-high fence and is used to collect solid fill material for a low-lying area just west of the main runway to the Norfolk Naval Air Station.

Two base police officers sitting in a police truck

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guarded the entrance to the landfill on Monday. The guards were removed Tuesday.

Senior spokesmen for the base denied Tuesday that the materials were either nuclear, chemical or biological.

"They absolutely are not," said Capt. Ed Schrock, a spokesman for the commander of the Norfolk Naval Base, Rear Adm. Jackson K. Parker. "I would sleep with the stuff if I had to."

The Navy earlier told inquiring employees that the buried items were "construction materials." However, after further inquiries, Schrock said he was permitted to say they contained "plastic and steel waste from a classified Navy test." He said he was prohibited from elaborating.

Schrock said he could confirm the number of containers — a total of 44 — and that they came from a naval facility that he believed was in Maryland. But he said he could not name the facility.

Public Works Center employees initially complained to union representatives with the Metal Trades Council that they suspected the containers held hazardous wastes and were concerned for their safety.

Union representatives launched an inquiry of Navy personnel, apparently on Monday, and

were told the materials were not hazardous.

"We checked into it and it's just construction materials," said Thomas E. Rinehart, chairman of the Metal Trades Council.

Public Works employees remained unconvinced Tuesday of the Navy's reasons for transporting materials all the way from Maryland to Norfolk and placing them in the type of containers normally used for burying hazardous wastes.

"It was not enough to get a whole bunch (of people) down here from Washington yesterday (Monday)," said one employee. "That dump is normally used for just construction materials — bricks and concrete and wood. I'm just not happy with this."

Neither the Department of Transportation's hazardous materials division nor the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said it had been contacted by the Navy in reference to the dumping. But they would not necessarily have been notified, even if the material was radioactive, since the Navy used its own truck and buried the material on its own property, spokesmen said.

"They wouldn't have to have a permit to bury it on their grounds," said Sue Gagner, a public affairs officer for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Alan I. Roberts, director of the Transportation Department's Office of Hazardous Materials Transportation, said that was also the case with his department. "If they moved it in a U.S. government vehicle, a military vehicle, we have no jurisdiction," he said.